



## Ellis welcomes opt-out option for amalgamations

THE decision to provide an opt-out option for shires who wished to 'try before they buy' in the amalgamation process was welcomed by Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis.

On Tuesday, February 9 the Local Government Minister announced that local governments which have not reached agreement but wished to amalgamate would be offered 'a staged process to assist in progressing reform at a considered pace, with options for review and negotiation'.

Mr Ellis said he had raised the opt-out option with the Minister late last year following a visit to Bruce Rock and the Minister had been receptive.

"Following my discussions with the Minister, on 22 December I emailed all the shires in the agriculture region inviting them to have a say on an opt-out option," Mr Ellis said.

Mr Ellis wrote in the email that the most contentious issue seemed to be the 'no opt-out' clause in the agreement for the proposed Regional Transition Groups.

"The 'no opt-out' agreement only applies to



Agricultural Region MLC Brian Ellis.

those councils that choose to be involved in the Regional Transition Groups with a view to forming a single new entity by 2013," the email said.

"However, many councils are nervous about being locked into an unproven arrangement and are consequently shying away from voluntary participation.

"I would therefore like to suggest that consideration be given to a 'try before you buy' period before the 'no opt-out' agreement takes effect.

"In my view an initial 'trial period' (of, say, 12 months) to shake down any initial problems would encourage some councils to at least give amalgamation a try with-

out being locked into long-term arrangements.

"I would be interested to hear from local governments as to whether they support the idea of a trial period with a view to working towards a single new entity by 2013 and will forward their views to the Minister."

Mr Ellis said he received about a dozen responses to his email, all calling for more flexibility in the process.

A former Moora deputy shire president for seven years, Mr Ellis said he had a hands-on understanding of the complexity of the amalgamation process and did not believe a 'one size fits all' approach was workable.

"We live in a State with huge differences in shire sizes, populations and geographic profiles and it makes sense to me that there should be some flexibility," he said.

"I therefore welcome the opportunity for local governments who are willing to 'give it a go' to have the option to 'review and renegotiate' so that they can work their way through the process.

"In the meantime, I note that the Minister has again emphasised that the process is voluntary."